
New Hampshire
*Department of Agriculture,
Markets & Food*

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Granite State Home & Garden

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Avoid Getting Burned When Buying Firewood

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Many Granite State residents use firewood as either a primary or secondary source of heat. Who would have thought that firewood, selling for about \$100 a cord a few years ago, would be selling for over \$200 a cord today. For those buying this commodity for the first time, here are some guidelines to help you get what you pay for.

Method of Sale—Firewood is sold by a measurement called a “cord.” A cord is determined by placing the wood in a line or row, with individual pieces touching and parallel to each other, making sure the wood is compact and has as few gaps as possible. If after measuring, the width times the height times the length equals 128 cubic feet, you have a cord of firewood. For example, you order three cords of firewood and ask that it be cut to 16 inches in length. You stack it 6 feet high in your well-ventilated woodshed that measures 12 feet in length inside. Sixteen inches (1 1/3 feet) times 12 feet times 6 feet equals 96 cubic feet for each row. If you have four rows you have your three cords. Remember—wood can only be sold by the cord or fraction thereof. Terms such as “truckload,” “pile,” “rack,” are not legally defined terms and mean nothing.

Firewood Dealer—Find a dealer that you can use year after year and this should eliminate most uncertainties about short measure or quality issues. Ask your neighbors whom they are dealing with. Does the dealer return phone calls and respond to customer concerns? Does the dealer leave a receipt (never pay cash for firewood or any commodity without getting a receipt)? Is the quality of the dealer’s wood acceptable, i.e., clean, uniformly cut, solid (no significant punky stuff) hardwood such as oak, maple, beech, yellow or black birch, ash, (no pine, poplar or too much white birch)?

Green, Seasoned or Dry Firewood? There are no legal definitions for these terms. In order for wood to burn properly and give off the desired heat, the moisture content must be controlled. For example, freshly cut hardwood contains about 70-80% moisture by weight. The best way to ensure burnable wood is to buy it “green” or freshly cut and season it yourself. Seasoning wood is not much different, in principle, than drying clothes outside. All wet clothes need to dry is sufficient sunshine and/or dry wind. Stack your cut and split wood in a place with sufficient sunshine and wind exposure for six to twelve months and you will be golden. If you cover the wood, only do it on the top with a slight drip edge. Do not cover the wood from top to bottom because the moisture has no place to go.

The Bureau of Weights and Measures, NH Dept. of Agriculture, Markets & Food, regulates the selling of all commodities sold by weight or measure, including firewood. If you think you’ve been short-changed, and the seller can’t or won’t correct the problem, contact the bureau at: PO Box 2042, Concord, NH 03302-2042, Tel. (603) 271-3700, Fax (603) 271-1109,
E-mail: rcote@agr.state.nh.us

With wood approaching \$2 a cubic foot for “seasoned “ firewood, it is worth taking the time to ensure that the only burning taking place during the upcoming northeasters is in your woodstove.

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